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SUBJECT: BENEDICT XVI: LOOKING AHEAD TO THE NEW PONTIFICATE - PART TWO

REF: A) VATICAN 0467; B) VATICAN 0475; C) VATICAN 0477

1. (U) This cable is the second of a series previewing the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. The first part (ref b) examined the reasons for the election of Pope Benedict and initial signals on directions for his papacy. This second cable examines the approach he is likely to take on major issues. A third cable will address the way that Benedict is likely to govern the Church and the dynamics of his management of the Curia.

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Summary  
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2. (SBU) The pontificate of Benedict XVI is not likely to bring about dramatic changes on issues facing the Catholic Church internally or externally. As one of John Paul II's closest collaborators, and one who perhaps more than any other member of the Curia helped shape John Paul II's pontificate, it would be unthinkable, as one of Pope Benedict's closest collaborators told us last week, that Pope Benedict would shift the Holy See's main doctrinal lines on core moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, artificial contraception, cloning, and homosexuality. Despite his strong defense of Catholic doctrine in a major 1999 document, he has already demonstrated a desire to continue John Paul II's efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue, and may be able to make more progress on Orthodox-Catholic dialogue than his Slavic predecessor. Pope Benedict has also indicated that he will press to continue expanding the Holy See's diplomatic relations to encompass countries where Catholic populations have faced religious restrictions and Muslim countries where Catholic populations are small or forced underground. On issues of war and peace, Benedict XVI, whose experience of World War II remains vivid, will continue John Paul II's efforts to promote peace. At the same time, recognizing the need to confront evil, he will be open to the idea that war may be necessary as a last resort. As a theologian who has devoted his life to theological debates, the new pope's views on international issues will likely take shape over time through his meetings with heads of state and government and in his contact with this Curial team -- which remains unchanged to date from that of John Paul II. He is said to like the United States, had more Americans on his staff than most other Curial heads, and sent an important signal with his first appointment, calling an American to head the Holy See's most important dicastery. End Summary.

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From Prefect to Pope  
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3. (SBU) While many observers are seeking to draw conclusions about the contours of Benedict XVI's pontificate based on his 21 years as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), many Vatican officials have cautioned that there is a vast difference between being Prefect of CDF and being Pope. Ratzinger is no longer the Church's top official for safeguarding Catholic theological orthodoxy, and it will no longer fall to him personally to set wayward theologians or other Catholics back on the straight and narrow path. He has already softened his image as doctrinal enforcer, and begun his effort to convince the world of what describes as "the common values and common truths on the essentials of human life -- how to live and how to respond to the great challenges of our time." Specifically, Benedict XVI has called for "moral responsibility, love and justice" to be introduced into the

world of work, trade and politics.

14. (SBU) While Benedict will no longer have to "play the heavy" on doctrine, this does not translate into greater freedom generally for the new pontiff. On the contrary, he will no longer be as free to speak and act as he was prior to his election as the 264th successor of Peter. As a global leader in a global age, Pope Benedict XVI's every word will be analyzed and taken as the authoritative view of the Catholic Church. Early indications are that Benedict is well aware of these distinctions, and that he has the potential to frame with clarity some of the leading international challenges of the twenty-first century. In the first month of his pontificate, he has signaled his desire to seek consensus, build bridges, listen to differing opinions, and speak the language of reconciliation and rapprochement. Most Church observers have been enthusiastic upon seeing the human side of Benedict few witnessed before his election.

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Staying the Course on "Moral Issues"  
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15. (SBU) The warmer public image of Pope Benedict XVI that has developed (and which his close associates assure us is much closer to reality than the traditional media portrayal of Cardinal Ratzinger) does not mean he has plans for a makeover of the Catholic Church's uncompromising stands on the sexual, bioethical, and family issues facing Catholics and the world community. Associates of the new pope have assured us there will be no change in the Catholic Church's position on abortion, euthanasia, artificial contraception, cloning, divorce and homosexuality. Benedict's approach to bioethical and biotechnological issues is likely to be founded on the core question: are new scientific procedures and possibilities conducive to real human advancement or will they lead to human destruction? The new pope will reach out to women, but he will not ordain them as priests. Benedict XVI will continue to support the Catholic Church's considerable efforts to care for persons with HIV/AIDS, its ban on condoms notwithstanding. During his inauguration homily he spoke of the human race living in a kind of desert -- a world without respect for human dignity and purpose with little regard for the Church's perspective on the issues noted above. He implied that as pope he would seek to address what he described as the deserts within, the "emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life" that he believes contribute to the deserts of poverty, hunger, and other earthly ills.

16. (SBU) In this regard, Benedict will maintain his predecessor's attention to poverty and development issues, to human rights, and religious freedom. In one area of continuing U.S. human rights focus -- human trafficking -- Pope Benedict has already spoken of his concern for this issue, ensuring that we will be able to continue the recent progress made with the Holy See in combating and preventing trafficking in persons. Pope John Paul had provided moral backing for our trafficking initiatives with various Holy See departments. Just prior to his election, Pope Benedict publicly condemned human trafficking, trafficking in organs, and human slavery during the Good Friday meditations he delivered that were broadcast live to hundreds of millions of television viewers.

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First Message to Diplomats  
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17. (SBU) In his first formal meeting with the Vatican diplomatic corps May 12, Pope Benedict outlined for the first time his broad foreign policy priorities, again signaling strong continuities with John Paul II's focus on human dignity, human rights, peace, and social and economic development. Citing his origins from a country "that has known war and the separation of brothers even from the same country," he stressed that he will be "particularly sensitive to dialogue" among different peoples,

and would work to overcome international conflict and tensions. Describing Nazism and Communism as destructive and inhumane ideologies that imposed a yoke of oppression, Benedict said the Church, diplomats, governments and people of good will were charged with building a peaceful society to "vanquish the temptation to pit cultures, ethnic groups and differing world views against each other."

18. (U) Recalling Pope John Paul II's "unique service to the cause of the unity of the human family", he recommitted the Holy See to safeguarding the fundamental human rights under threat in different parts of the world. The Church would work, he said, to ensure every person had the right to life, nutrition, shelter, health care, the protection of the family, and social development. Our bilateral cooperation with the new pope and his administration is likely to find fertile soil in these areas.

19. (SBU) The biggest surprise of his first presentation was his pointed appeal to China and other nations that have yet to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See (ref c). The Holy See already has relations with 174 countries, and the pope made clear that he would like to extend that representation even further. Leaving no doubt of his focus on China and Vietnam in particular, he expressed his hope that countries (such as China) that had sent condolence messages on the death of his predecessor or had send delegations to the funeral (such as Vietnam) would soon be represented at the Vatican. This signals Pope Benedict's desire to build on Pope John Paul II's broad foundation of international activity and, in this way, to

expand the religious liberty for Catholics and those of other faiths.

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Sexual Abuse  
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110. (SBU) By most accounts, Benedict is intimately aware of the details of sexual-abuse scandals that have consumed the media in recent years. In fact, some of his close associates have suggested he is perhaps more familiar with the dimensions and details of the problem than any other Curial official, given that his former Congregation is the Vatican department that oversees the investigation of clergy charged with abuse. One former colleague who worked in CDF with Ratzinger for years told us that staff routinely reviewed the files of allegations against clergy the world over every Friday with Ratzinger, a process that they came to refer to as their "Friday penance." Benedict XVI may well believe that in the case of the crisis in the U.S. Church, the American media treated the clergy as a group unfairly, and in some cases have used the crisis to promote their own agendas. But he has no doubt that the crisis was real. In a stern sermon delivered before the conclave (ref a) in which he decried all types of evil facing society, the pope lashed out at the "filth" to be found among Catholic clergy. Our contacts were struck by the strength of the language, and told us that Ratzinger's German text had used an even stronger word. None of this means that Rome will overturn centuries of traditional hesitation in stepping into the personnel matters of individual dioceses; however, Benedict XVI will give due attention to the state of seminary training and the type of men who want to become priests (a program of checks begins shortly in American seminaries.) He may also offer more guidance to bishops on these issues than did Pope John Paul II.

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Inter-religious Dialogue  
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111. (SBU) After his election as pope, the sensationalistic British press ran headlines about young Joseph Ratzinger's membership in the Hitler Youth. Some observers also depicted him as hostile to other faiths, particularly due to a document issued in 2000 on the nature of the Church and the process of salvation that pronounced Christ and the Catholic Church as

unique in that process -- a document that was intended to address internal Church debates rather than its relations with other faiths. In fact, Ratzinger was a major part of Pope John Paul's great strides in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. John Paul II generally pushed forward with his initiatives on this front only after securing the theological and ecclesiastical underpinnings necessary to do so, and Ratzinger was the official who gave him that backing. Ratzinger's career and his words since becoming pope suggest he will continue to reach out to other Christian churches and to other world religions, particularly Judaism and Islam.

12. (SBU) Comments about the new Pope from religious leaders around the world have with few exceptions been very positive, especially among Muslims and Jews. Fr. Norbert Hofmann, the Secretary of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations

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with Jews, told us he expected great things from the Ratzinger papacy. He noted that Benedict had granted his first private audience for a Vatican dicastery to his office. Though it probably didn't hurt that Hofmann and his boss, Cardinal Walter Kasper, are Germans, the signal is significant, and has been backed up by a number of early public references by the new pope for his desire to build close ties with Judaism. Benedict XVI will almost certainly insist on the Catholic Church taking an unwavering position on its doctrine within future ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, but this clarity and honesty, combined with a desire for dialogue, could yield tangible results in a process that has suffered from a lack of clear guidelines for many Catholics engaged in dialogue with other faiths.

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War, Peace, Iraq  
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13. (SBU) On issues of war and peace, Benedict XVI has been consistent and vocal. After September 11, he strongly condemned religiously-inspired violence and noted that the Christian tradition of just war theory needed to be updated on the basis of "new dangers" in the world. However, in the lead-up to the coalition's invasion of Iraq, Ratzinger stated repeatedly and

unequivocally that the concept of preventive war did not appear in the official teachings of the Catholic Church, and maintained that the war against Iraq had no moral justification. As coalition troops took control of the country, Ratzinger expressed his satisfaction that the end of the war was drawing near. Like Pope John Paul II, he turned the page on the decision to go to war, and described the end of hostilities as a chance to "begin again," urging broad participation by the international community in the reconstruction of Iraq. Ratzinger emphasized the benefits of multilateralism and his preference for a preeminent role for the United Nations, declaring that no one nation should ever make decisions for the world. Pope Benedict XVI is therefore likely to continue to advocate multilateralism on war and peace issues. Because of his close experience of the evil of some ideologies, he will continue to recognize that nations may justifiably use force to defend their citizens, but he, like John Paul II, will likely express a hearty skepticism for the benefits of any war.

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Comment  
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14. (SBU) Taking on the papacy after one of the longest and most compelling reigns in history, Pope Benedict XVI has made a strong start as pontiff. He has maintained respect for his predecessor while tracing the outlines of what he plans to be the work of his own pontificate. In this way, he has succeeded in assuring the faithful with continuity, while at the same time making clear his desire to pursue this course with his own approach. Significantly, he has made clear that he see himself first and foremost as the successor of the Apostle Peter, not of John Paul II.

15. (SBU) In foreign affairs, Pope Benedict XVI will, as he indicated to the diplomatic corps, continue to pursue the same broad goals as John Paul II, using the Holy See's moral voice to promote human dignity, peace, and social and economic development. While he will certainly develop his own distinctive style in foreign affairs, he is coming to the papacy at an advanced age, without substantial foreign policy experience, and will not have the luxury of time that John Paul II had to develop detailed global geo-political expertise. Our contacts in the Curia expect Pope Benedict to rely on the Vatican Foreign Ministry as he wades into these issues. In fact, one senior official noted that his address to the diplomatic corps was the only one of his early addresses that he did not draft himself. By keeping Secretary of State Sodano and Secretary for Relations with States Lajolo in their positions,

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he has foreign affairs counsel that he trusts, and which will ensure broad continuity in the Vatican's successful foreign engagement.

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